FRIDAY - SUNDAY, MARCH 12 - 14, 2010

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

ASIA

GOOD WORKS

A Taiwan charity's global reach

Inside: What's next in yachts

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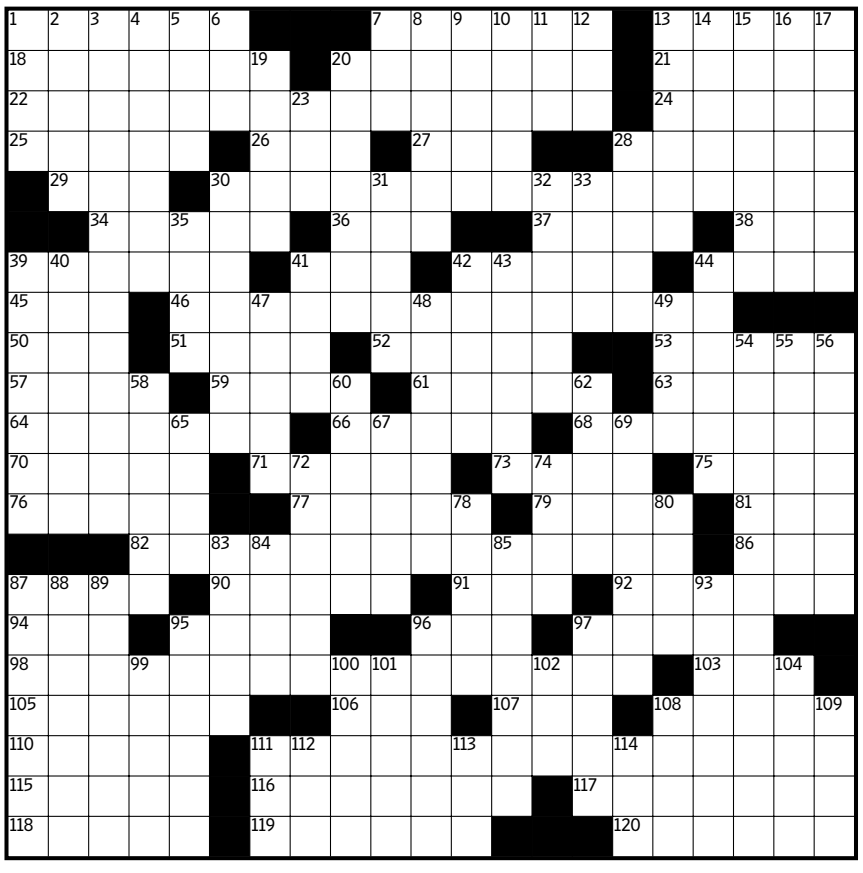

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Last Week's solution

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Wow, now: the Charlie girl

In autumn shows, the pantsuit and 'matchy-matchy' styles reign

By Christina Binkley

Paris

The autumn 2010 collections may offer the best clothes for working women since Yves St. Laurent introduced the sleek "Le Smoking" pantsuit in 1966.

In Milan, Gucci, Jil Sander, Etro, Marni, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, Bottega Veneta and Aquilano Rimondi all showed elegant, classic versions of women's suits—tailored jackets with either pants or skirts to match. In New York, Marc Jacobs, Michael Kors and others did the same.

It's hard to overstate how different the new suits are from the dominant styles of the past few years. Very recently—until a couple of weeks ago, in fact—being "matchy-matchy" was considered a fashion crime. Florals could be mixed with plaid and sable with denim. But a tailored jacket that matched its pants or skirt suggested a blind eye toward style. A key look was a dress worn with a cardigan, Michelle Obama-style. Now, it looks as if designers have moved on from the first lady to adopt Xerox Chairman Anne Mulcahy as a muse.

Also, many of the clothes shown on runways in recent years were plunging, see-through, micromini, or so skinny that they would inspire a week of water-cooler talk at the office. That left a lot of working woman shopping at Talbots or St. John and feeling awkwardly out of fashion.

The new look is comfortable, strong and far from body-revealing. It's redolent of the "Charlie girl"—the pantsuit-wearing woman in the early-1970s ads for Revlon's Charlie perfume. In contrast to the power-shoulder looks introduced in recent years, there is nothing exaggerated about these clothes except the luxury of the fabrics. The silhouette is elongated, with long jackets and flowy, relatively wide-legged pants.

The Charlie girl, as played by the model Shelley Hack, influenced thousands of women (including a young Oprah Winfrey, the entertainer recently said on her show) who wanted to be just like the figure in the ads: a modern career woman, sexy and confident. She wore a fluid pantsuit whose tailored jacket, trousers and silk blouse all matched.

These days, women aren't as optimistic about career empowerment. But in Milan, Tomas Maier, who showed a swank Charlie-girl suit for Bottega Veneta, recalled that '70s optimism. "Clothes are not in control. Women are in control," he said after his show.

Aquilano Rimondi, designed by Tommaso Aquilano and Roberto Rimondi, showed another version of a Charlie-girl suit—dark, double-breasted and wide-lapeled—in a wearable collection that contrasted sharply with the overly dressy and complicated looks they've shown in past seasons. The duo made a similar about-face at Gianfranco Ferre, which they also design, by featuring comfy-looking wide-legged pants in a sparkly gray wool, along with other highly tailored looks that seemed cut to flatter rather than to reveal.

The suiting trend is so marked that even designers who are known for something entirely different are showing it. Veronica Etro, renowned for her vivid colors, bohemian patterns and fluid fabrics, showed matching tops and narrow-legged pants, as well as a coral-colored Charlie-girl suit, updated with cropped, cuffed, wide-legged pants under its double-breasted jacket.

Miuccia Prada heralded her autumn collection as "normal" clothing—"classical, classical," she said. She showed nip-waisted dresses, with darts at the bustline to fit a regular woman's figure, and simple heels. It was such a turn from what's usually on her runways (hip waders and panty-shorts were the essence of her last winter collection) that it seemed almost subversive.

It will be exciting to see how these collections sell when they arrive in stores. American department stores appear to be embracing the approach. Ken Downing, fashion director for Neiman Marcus, said in Milan that it's been a "good season so far."

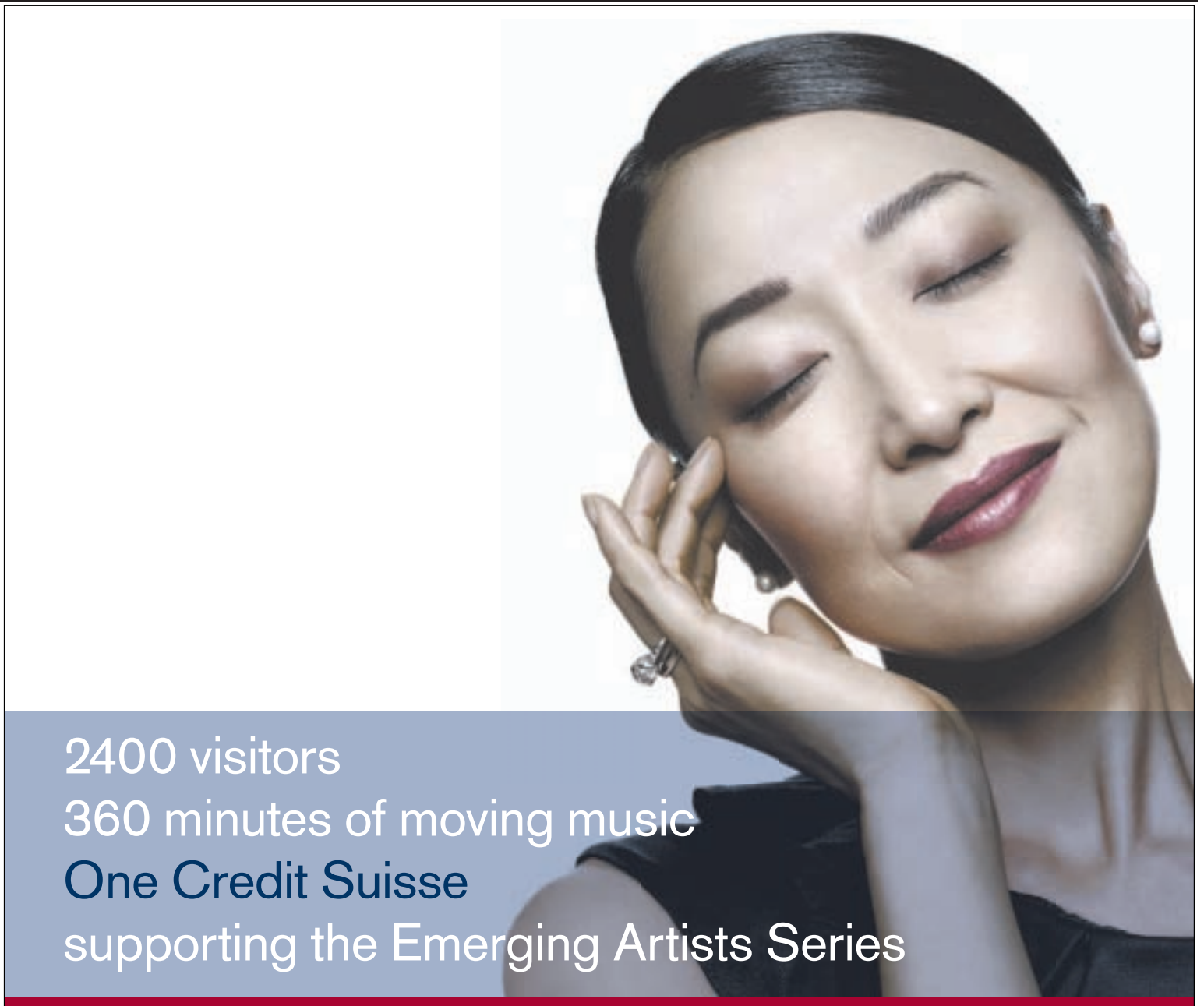
As she waited for Gucci's show to begin in Milan, Linda Fargo, Bergdorf Goodman's fashion director, said she welcomes the "return to classic tailoring." What followed at Gucci was a lot of matching gray suiting—tailored jackets and long pants—and an emphasis on texture and luxury fabrics.

The height of the trend came at Dolce & Gabbana, which has built its reputation on provocative ads and shows. This season, it offered an emotional tribute to the tailored jacket—and the skills of the seamstresses and tailors who labor on the Italian company's clothing.

Reuters (top); Associated Press (right)

Dolce & Gabbana sent tailored jackets down the runway, top; Marc Jacobs featured a gray three-piece suit, right.

A film in the backdrop showed these employees measuring, pinning and stitching in slow motion, as live models in the foreground wore versions of tailored suits. The nod to tailoring was so full of reverence that it left numerous moist eyes in the audience. Then the show closed—not on the standard fantasy gown but on a perfectly tailored overcoat.



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A comfort zone in Paris

Fashion week's autumn shows present a new casualness

By Christina Binkley
and Christina Passariello

Paris

Parisian runway shows are famous for closing with a series of elaborate gowns. But by the middle of the city's autumn fashion week, those formal French looks were few and far between. Instead, there was a definite air of comfy and sporty this season.

The final week in the month-long marathon of autumn 2010 shows started on an upbeat note, with unusually sunny weather and the relief of a more relaxed pace after the rush of the shortened Milan fashion week that preceded this one. Meshing with the mood was a focus on sweaters, sportswear-influenced styles and comfortable-looking slacks, the kind you could sit cross-legged in.

At Nina Ricci, designer Peter Copping's collection was based on "sensual wearable clothes that define contemporary," according to his show notes. The look was throw-on-and-go, with wrinkly satin and sweaters tossed over silk skirts. Belgian designer Dries Van Noten didn't entirely ditch the silk prints and ethnic-looking clothing he is known for, but he mixed in casual sweatshirts, throwing in a slouchy khaki version over a floor-length purple silk skirt with a narrow train. He also did walk-in-the-country parkas, creating a weathered navy-blue version with embroidered black sleeves and a tightly belted waist.

At the Hôtel de Crillon March 4, influential design house Balenciaga showed not a single gown—leaving some attendees unsure whether the show was over when the final look, a pink quilted sort of dress of padded paper and fabric, passed by. Designer Nicolas Ghesquière said after his show that he was interested in "domestic" materials this season. The silhouettes of his pants and dresses were simple and often based on sportswear, including some that looked like unzipped sleeping bags, though the paper and padded-fabric materials were as much art as apparel. His colors were cheerful and brilliant, as though backlit.

Paris fashion week, which follows fashion weeks in New York, London and Milan and ended Wednesday, featured shows of Jean Paul Gaultier, Givenchy, Yves St. Laurent, Chanel, Valentino and Louis Vuitton, all brands known for their high-end clientele and over-the-top luxury. The most anticipated collection of the entire season was that of Alexander McQueen, who died in February.

That said, the trend—as seen on the runway here—toward more versatile clothing is likely to be welcomed by many retailers, which are finding that in a shaky economy, customers want to get more use out of each item of clothing they buy.

Karen Daskas, owner of the Tender Birmingham boutique near Detroit, says she's noticed a big change in her customers, women who wear Lanvin and Valentino. "People don't want to dress up anymore," she says. Her clients don't want to buy a dress so memorable that they can't wear it twice. They want help determining several ways to style a look—for daytime, evening, winter and spring.

For Dior, John Galliano struck a sporting theme, trotting out a series of leather jodhpurs and long leather riding coats and jackets. The horsey theme ended there, though, unless the typical Dior client gallops about in fluttery silk dresses, adorned with sequins and ruffles. Those dresses seemed more suited to the boudoir than the stable—and more for editorial spreads than actual sales.

Isabel Marant, a French designer who has developed a cult following in the U.S., mixed dressy and casual elements, creating a mélange of street-wear and evening-wear styles. Sequined cropped pants were worn with a jean jacket, and a tuxedo jacket was worn over polka-dot pants. A dressy silver brocade skirt was paired with a man-style cotton buttoned shirt.

At Balmain, designer Christophe Decarnin fought the casual current. Gold lamé dresses and richly brocaded overcoats gave the collection a decadence that was rare on Paris runways. The palette of black, gold and purple was royal, and matched the décor of the gilded ballroom of the hotel where the runway show was held. Even the skinny trousers were woven through with sparkly gold thread.

At Lanvin, one of Paris's hot shows last week, Alber Elbaz stayed focused on big loose shoulders on a silhouette that narrowed toward the waist and hips. Folds of fabric created a graceful drape around the body—something Mr. Elbaz has made a signature.

Getty Images (4)

Looks from the runways of Nina Ricci, left, and Balenciaga, above; a dressier look from the Balmain show, below right; the runway show by John Galliano for Christian Dior, below left

A doctor in the house

A genome biologist builds a California home for his 'toys and joys'

By Sara Lin

La Jolla, California

Entrepreneur J. Craig Venter, whose company recently signed a $300 million deal with Exxon Mobil to develop renewable energy sources, uses solar energy to warm the water of his new home and heat his pool. He's installed energy-efficient custom LED lights and drives an electric-powered Tesla.

He also owns a gas-guzzling Range Rover and an Aston Martin. "I try to drive the two motorcycles and the Tesla more often to balance out the others," Dr. Venter said with a twinge of guilt, surveying the cars, motorcycles, surfboards, kayaks and other items parked in what he called his "toys and joys room." When he isn't working, Dr. Venter and his wife Heather Kowalski ride their motorcycles into the Borego desert or take their 14-meter-long jet boat out for a spin. (Ms. Kowalski said her 63-year-old husband likes to do "large donuts.")

Hailed by some as a genius and scorned by others as a showman, Dr. Venter remains as ambitious as ever. "We're trying to solve the energy crisis and create life," he said, describing the effort by his research institute and company to create a life-form that could be used to produce alternative fuels, among other things. But the biologist, who is known for his work decoding the human genome, is beginning to embrace a somewhat mellower lifestyle, and now leaves his townhome in Northern Virginia to spend nearly half the year in a 5,000-square-foot cream-colored contemporary glass-and-stucco home sitting on a craggy hillside overlooking the Pacific.

"This is the longest that I've been in one place in 30 years," he said. "I'm saying 'no' to more and more events because it's so nice here."

The outer walls of the L-shaped house are mostly glass, maximizing views. Inside, the decor is midcentury modern with a heavy emphasis on wood: tables, sculptures, tree-stump stools. Scattered around are a handful of large wooden model ships as well as Dr. Venter's art collection, much of it assembled during travels aboard the Sorcerer, his 29-meter sloop and research vessel that trolls the seas collecting marine genetic samples.

Near the front door are a pair of weathered 1.8-meter-tall Burmese tombstones from the 1800s that resemble teak totem poles. Hanging in another room is an elaborately carved wooden plank from Ghana that was once the door to a medicine man's hut. And from Fiji, a 1.7-meter-tall warrior wears an intense, penetrating stare. "He frightens a lot of people," said Ms. Kowalski.

For Dr. Venter, moving to California is something of a homecoming. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, he moved at 17 to Newport Beach, near San Diego, to chase waves and girls. Drafted to serve in Vietnam, Dr. Venter was a Navy medic, an experience that spurred him to his biology career. As a scientist for the National Institutes of Health, he pioneered a technical shortcut that helped speed up the search for genes. He broke off to start his research institute and Celera Genomics. In 2000, the firm and U.S. government scientists announced a tie in the race to decode the human genome.

But the victory was tainted by what many scientists viewed as egoism—much of the genome Dr. Venter sequenced was his own, rather than a mix of genes from anonymous donors. Fired by the company in 2002, Dr. Venter has since founded a nonprofit research institute in Rockville, Maryland, and Synthetic Genomics, both with offices here.

When he bought the La Jolla property three years ago for $6 million, Dr. Venter says the house was a slice of 1985, the year of its construction. "It had shag carpeting and a terrarium that was leaking and overgrown," Dr. Venter said, adding that he liked the area's privacy and views. He spent 18 months and $3 million gut-renovating the three-story house, adding glass and converting an office into a screening room. He built a gym and sauna and a 900-square-foot front deck, where he and his wife were married a year and a half ago. Lower down the hill, a 5,900-square-foot single-story home with similar coastal views is on the market for $5.9 million.

On a recent Monday, Dr. Venter turned his living room into an office meeting space, as he often does when he's in town. Two assistants tapped away on BlackBerry devices and laptops as they discussed his calendar. An hour later, a trio of scientists from his research institute walked in to discuss the budget for a new project. "Pick a stump," Dr. Venter called out.

The group admired the latest addition to the Venter family: a rust-colored miniature poodle puppy named Darwin. "Have you sequenced his genome yet, Craig?" asked Ken Nealson, a microbiologist. "What are you waiting for? He's evolving."

"Craig is more relaxed here. It's a more efficient place for him. He can have his meetings down here and then run upstairs for a conference call. It really works," Ms. Kowalski said.

Ethan Pines for The Wall Street Journal

'This is the longest that I've been in one place in 30 years,' says biologist J. Craig Venter: an open atrium in Mr. Venter's La Jolla, California, house, top; the exterior, right

Arbitrage

A Logitech Harmony One Advanced universal remote

Logitech

City	Currency	US$
London	£120	$180
Hong Kong	HK$1,699	$219
New York		$229
Shanghai*	1,750 yuan	$256
Rome	€198	$269
Frankfurt	€199	$271
Tokyo*	¥24,531	$273
Brussels	€215	$292
Paris	€219	$298
Jakarta	2.96 million rupiah	$322

*Available online only; price includes shipping

Prices, including taxes, converted to the nearest U.S. dollar

Delightful, delicious...

De-Luxembourg? Chef Léa Linster pushes a tiny nation's big cuisine

By Rhea Wessel

Frisange, Luxembourg

Léa Linster, considered one of the best chefs in the world, was experimenting with the humble potato on a recent Monday afternoon at her one-Michelin-star Restaurant Léa Linster. She intently examined the thin slices, looking for clues about their starchiness. "People underestimate how difficult it is to achieve the perfect combination of crispy and chewy," she says.

A favorite vegetable in Luxembourg, the potato appears in many forms in Ms. Linster's other restaurant, the home-cooking eatery, Kaschthaus, in the town of Hellange. At her signature Michelin-starred spot, a couple of kilometers east in Frisange, it incarnates in more noble ways that befit a French gourmet. In fact, the menu still includes a potato dish that won Ms. Linster first place in the 1989 Bocuse d'Or, a prestigious biennial competition for chefs from around the world: a saddle of lamb wrapped in a crisp, wafer-thin potato pancake. Ms. Linster browns the potato pancake on one side before she wraps it around lightly breaded lamb and bakes the duo.

At both her restaurants, Ms. Linster has long made a showcase of her native Luxembourg cuisine, which includes such specialties as *kniddelen*, a type of flour dumpling, and *bouneschlupp*, a green-bean roux-based stew garnished with pork sausage.

Now, some 20 years after Ms. Linster became the first and only woman to win that coveted Bocuse d' Or prize, she has become a formal ambassador of her country's cuisine. At ITB Berlin, a tourism trade fair that draws more than 170,000 visitors over its three days (this year ending March 12), she will officially represent Luxembourg, preparing dishes right at the country's booth.

Luxembourg tourism authorities hope to position their country, a Grand Duchy that leads the world in Michelin stars per capita, as a culinary destination. With a population of less than 500,000, its roster of starred restaurants includes Manoir Kasselslay, known for the creative use of regional products and its setting inside one of the country's parks; Toit pour Toi, with its eclectic interpretation of French gourmet cuisine; and Restaurant Yves Radelet, also focused on regional ingredients, including some organic products.

Restaurant critic and publisher Holger Gettmann, whose Guide Orange offers restaurant and shopping recommendations, calls Ms. Linster's official appearance long overdue. "Ms. Linster embodies Luxembourg's charm and peculiarities," he says. "You can see it when she's on German television. She's highly skilled and recognized for her experience." Ms. Linster appears frequently as a guest chef on cooking shows "Lanz Kocht" ("Lanz Cooking," hosted by Markus Lanz) and "Küchenschlacht" ("Kitchen Battle").

Ms. Linster, 55 years old, has trained alongside the world's best chefs, including Paul Bocuse, Joël Robuchon and Frédy Girardet. Yet she hasn't let go of the down-to-earth principles that manifest in her personal style and cooking. She says she prefers dishes without overbearing sauces, such as scallops grilled with perfect brown trim and tossed in a salad of endive and artichoke.

She strives to let individual ingredients speak for themselves and retain their original character. "Molecular cuisine," which uses chemical transformation to produce familiar flavors in unfamiliar forms—from liquid olives to espresso foam—is a trend to which she refuses to adapt. "If you change food too much, you kill the soul of it," Ms. Linster says.

Her choice of decor and the way she runs her kitchen reflects her philosophy as well. She offers guests a sleek but unpretentious environment, and she says she avoids waste—not an easy feat for a gourmet.

While sticking to her principles, Ms. Linster is in the process of expanding and transforming her culinary empire, which includes the two restaurants, a media brand (TV appearances and a food column in the German women's magazine Brigitte) and a publishing enterprise (six cookbooks so far). She is looking for a partner with whom to open a restaurant in Manhattan—she has a home on the Upper East Side.

She is also remodeling her 60-seat signature restaurant. As part of the transformation, Ms. Linster has increased her marketing efforts. The facade of her restaurant in Frisange, a village of several thousand people a 20-minute drive from the country's chief city, also called Luxembourg, is now decorated with a billboard-style photo of her face. Years ago she wouldn't have been so bold, says Ms. Linster, who laughs as she comments on the oversize photo, a stark contrast with the rural environment.

"It's big enough so that people won't actually take it seriously," she says.

Ms. Linster's father was a chef, and she grew up playing hostess at the family's restaurant in Frisange; at the age of 16 she made her first meal for guests: chicken in a Riesling sauce and a prune pie. She went to university to study law, but returned abruptly when her father fell ill nearly three decades ago.

Ms. Linster says it was from her father that she acquired her good taste and cooking intuition. "He had the palate of a god," she says, adding he had a knack for refining Luxembourg specialties with French touches.

Connoisseurs will point out what gives Luxembourg's cooking its own character: Freshwater delights, such as frog legs and pike, Riesling sauces and a good dose of garlic to honor the country's large Italian population (from a wave of immigration more than a century ago), as well as newer Portuguese arrivals. And although Luxembourg cuisine resembles potato-rich German cooking, with a dab of French finesse, it is more than a mélange. Maximilian von Hochberg, the general manager of the Hotel Sofitel Luxembourg Europe, says, "The French are attracted to Luxembourg because of its Continental touch, while Germans appreciate the French overtones."

At the same time, the business crowd is increasingly an Anglo-Saxon troupe, says Mr. von Hochberg. Luxembourg, long a banking hub and home to European Union institutions, is becoming a center for information technology. Skype, the Internet-telephony company that's now part of eBay, and Amazon.com both have their European headquarters here.

Restaurants in the Kirchberg district, home to the European Court of Justice and the European Investment Bank, do a brisk business at lunch. At night, diners seek out the smaller, cozier restaurants (and nightlife) in the cobblestone alleyways of the Grund area of Luxembourg's ancient city center—a Unesco World Heritage Site for the remains of fortifications put up by a series of European powers that held the city over the centuries.

This expansion as a haven for high technology bodes well for restaurateurs. Back at her signature restaurant, Luxembourg's patron chef continued working on her potatoes, which she dramatically drizzled with sea salt. As she performed her magic, Ms. Linster mused about people and her own journey from girl hostess to celebrated chef.

She says the way people evolve is more important than first impressions: "I love to give people a chance. I love it even more when they know how to take it."

Rhea Wessel is a writer based in Kronberg, Germany.

Marc Theis

Chef Léa Linster and a few dishes: above, bouneschlupp, a green-bean-and-sausage stew; left, from the top, warm lobster salad, potato patties and pumpkin soup (in the making)

Masayoshi Takayama, the chef behind Shaboo and Bar Masa, above, also runs the kitchen at Masa in New York City.

What happened in Vegas

A visit to City Center turns up fine dining and some empty seats

By Raymond Sokolov

Las Vegas

A Martian landing in MGM Mirage's huge and elegant City Center would think that the 28-hectare site with its six hotel and condo towers designed by world-class architects had plopped down in the center of Sin City's Strip as smoothly as his saucer. Most terrestrials, even casual readers of financial news like me, know that this behemoth nearly collapsed into a bankruptcy that threatened the monetary health of its biggest partner, Dubai.

But now the place is well on its way to completeness. Gamblers are feeding the slots at Aria, the central property. Shoppers are trolling for glitz in Daniel Libeskind's cavernous fun house of a mall, Crystals. There is major-league art everywhere, by Robert Rauschenberg, Jenny Holzer, Frank Stella and, from Nancy Rubins, a monumental assemblage of multicolored boats moored together in the circular traffic island facing Pelli Clarke Pelli's hugely shimmering 61-story Aria and Rafael Vinoly's restrained, casino-less hotel/condominium Vdara. But most enticing for me was the lure of three "fine-dining" restaurants masterminded by three famous chefs.

How did we pick this trio out of the dozens toothsomely described in City Center's advance publicity? They had to be outposts of very well-respected venues outside Vegas whose chefs had never worked here before. This may have been unfair to Michael Mina's American Fish or Julian Serrano's clever-looking celebration of Spain, named after himself, at Aria, or Wolfgang Puck's Bistro inside Crystals. But news is news. And the arrival of three-star French master-toque Pierre Gagnaire in North America, and the Las Vegas debuts of Chicago headliner Shawn McClain (Sage) and Masayoshi Takayama (Bar Masa and Shaboo), wizard of rawness at Masa in Manhattan's Time Warner Center, were the biggest news in this first season of City Center.

If, however, the only restaurant you fetched up in here was Mr. Takayama's Shaboo, you would have been on your smartphone right away selling MGM Mirage short. Admittedly Shaboo sets the bar very high, even for the highflyingest diner: $500 a person for a set but unpredictable meal, exclusive of wine and tax. And even if you are willing to blow that kind of coin on a blue-chip version of the traditional Japanese hot-pot cuisine, you will also have to pass a credit check and not lose your nerve after two warnings, one from a reservationist and the other from a captain, about how pricey your indulgent dinner is going to be.

MGM Mirage (Shaboo); Jeff Green for The Wall Street Journal (Twist)

Sea scallops and foie gras at Twist, left, come courtesy of French master-toque Pierre Gagniere; white truffle soba tea ice cream with gold at Shaboo, right, is a creation of Mr. Takayama.

You also have to find Shaboo, which is a dark inner sanctum tucked away to the side of Bar Masa, Mr. Takayama's main Las Vegas tent, which is shaped like a step-roofed pagoda and serves sushi/sashimi improvisations (*akamutsu* deep-sea snapper from Chiba, Japan, for $10 apiece) that had local dining critics gasping with disbelief.

Will Mr. Takayama ever fill the potential maximum of 418 seats at Bar Masa? Maybe. But now, attendance in the big top is sparse and my wife and I had Shaboo, with its intimate 52 seats, all to ourselves, literally, except for a gallant staff of young women attendants, who helped us get the hang of pushing foie gras and other luxury oddments around in broth simmering over cool magnetic induction burners integrated into our table. We counted eight courses and many ingredients flown in at great cost from Japan. And it may be that if we were a couple of deeply experienced Japanese shabu-shabu lovers, this would have been some kind of pinnacle in our overcosseted gustatory lives. But as nonadepts at this form of mink-lined Zen cookery, we had a far finer time for far less liquidation of euro-yen across the hall in the vast Aria lobby-atrium-casino at Sage.

Young Mr. McClain is not trying for a Guinness world record as priciest chef at Sage. But he might deserve one for most eclectically attentive to high-end trends. Sage's subfusc elegance serves as an all-purpose foil for food that represents his personal version of dishes that are hot all around the gastro-stratosphere. There's a delicious foie gras crème brûlée, a triumph of unctuous texture plays. Also a slow-cooked "farm" egg, Iberico pork, toffee pudding—and a lot of other currently hot ideas that are executed with assurance and originality.

For a meal that truly justifies the worn-out accolade "fine dining," Sage is your destination in City Center. For something even higher and brighter, but not ridiculously overfussy, reserve at Twist, Pierre Gagnaire's bistro on the 23rd floor of the discreet new Mandarin Oriental.

I'd already eaten with mixed emotions at Mr. Gagnaire's flagship restaurant in Paris some years ago, finding its florid food amazingly intricate but a muddle in the mouth: All those carefully managed ingredients melted together without any unifying taste drama. So I was not an easy sell at Twist, despite its eagle's view of the lights of Vegas and the knowing assistance of a sommelier I trusted all the more since I had spied her at lunch at the Beard Award-nominated Thai restaurant Lotus of Siam, an unglamorous foodie mecca with a renowned German wine list in a grotty mall north of the Strip.

Mr. Gagnaire has reined in his vaunted creativity and produced a menu at Twist that, as Michelin says of its top choices, rates a special trip. He has not abandoned his take-no-prisoners style. But a dish like the foie-gras tasting—four separate preparations (terrine with dried figs and toasted ginger bread; custard with green lentils and grilled zucchini; seared, with duck glaze and fruit marmalade; croquette with trevicchio purée), by being divided into four compartments, organizes your sensations, and adds up to an awe-inspiring and analytic tribute to the most overused expensive ingredient of all.

Mr. Gagnaire also has turned into an American locavore, sourcing his never-confined veal in Wisconsin from the estimable Strauss company. And if you want to see what a great cook can do with American lobster, try the symphonic dish that includes lobster poached in Sauternes with an impressive entourage of garnishes and a lobster bisque.

If you are raising an eyebrow over my use of the term "locavore," well, let me clarify. I mean that Mr. Gagnaire knows enough to pick ingredients produced with ultimate finesse in America. He is not flying potatoes in from France. And his prices (about $50 for an a la carte entree; $185 for a six-course tasting menu) make Twist look like a bargain in the same megacomplex that hopes to support Shaboo.

But, of course, if you win big at the tables...

At the start of the trail, Denpasar tempers the sprawl with some local color, such as thistemple with offerings.

One hour out: Bali

Escape to the high country (for coffee)

By John Krich

Considering how much I've consumed over a lifetime, it seemed remarkable that I had never seen coffee—meaning the actual bean on the bush.

But here I was in Bali, whose coffee-growing region seemed to come, in the Balinese manner, with so much more: mountain views, temples and terraces. So on an island where nearly everything, barring the agricultural West's bull racing, can be reached within an hour and some scant meditative moments, I decided to make coffee country my day-trip destination. (There are a great range of atmospheric upcountry escapes available. A sprawling Denpasar, and even more so, the tourist strips concentrated on Bali's southernmost nub, provide ever-increasing reasons for making the attempt.)

Another in a series of articles seeking to answer the question, When a traveler has had about enough of the jingle-jangle of the urban jungle, can relief be just an hour away?

Even the gas stations along the way come with piped-in, tinkly gamelan music. Small-town main streets are lined with delicate, statuary-festooned temple compounds, the roadside stands along the way are mostly seasonal ones for durian and jackfruit (which I sample along with, strangely enough, an avid Chinese couple from Los Angeles), and the pit stops now include one called Babi Guling (Suckling Pig) Obama.

Seeing this is an island, no matter which road you follow, you'll eventually get to the sea (with a brooding volcano or two in between.) My chosen path aims straight for Bedugul and beyond. But things start to get interesting at Pacung, where the views of rice terraces open up and the climb toward, or through, a breathtaking line-up of black peaks.

As it turns out, Bedugul isn't much but a sprawling wet market, plied by peasants in woolen caps and long-sleeved shirts that flop oversize over sarongs. Just over an hour from Denpasar's limits, the place feels like a way station in Nepal or the lower Andes, quite a shock after a morning's loll in the tub-warm waves of Jimbaran beach. It doesn't take long for microclimates to change on Bali.

I get another surprise when my driver makes a wrong left turn at the market junction. Instead of heading farther uphill toward Munduk, this road ends at the entrance to Eka Karya Botanic Garden, one of four botanic gardens run by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. Founded in 1959, it, too defies expectations. Laid out in broad avenues and circular roads in the late Indo-fascist manner, this is no place for a brief stroll to sniff the flowers. It's more suited to a day's backpacking: 157 hectares of luxuriant, shadow-dappled high-altitude forest preserve, including numerous stands of birch. There are temples and traditional houses hidden here and there, along with obligatory rose and orchid displays. There's also a kiosk that sells herbal remedies—based on Usada, or Balinese healing—that are derived from native plants.

But I'm after another sort of potent plant, the kind that brings a buzz to wake me each morning. Before reaching coffee country proper, the landscape is dominated by strawberry farms. It's not exactly scenic, with much of the ground around the budding berries covered in protective plastic wrap, but one roadside farm is fronted by a "Strawberry Stop" cafe that makes a passable milkshake. It greatly improves the usual *nasi goreng* (fried rice).

Now the road toward Bali's north coast veers west in a precipitous rise along a ridge with magnificent views of two adjacent, elongated lakes, the larger Danau Buyan, that form the island's eerily quiet heart. While the waters below are shimmering and shallow, perfect for snapshots, there don't seem to be any boats out. I wonder whether the Balinese, never big fish-eaters, see more spiritual than material sustenance in these carpet-like waters. (Later, I read a more mundane explanation: Fertilizers have polluted the lakes, which have been receding due to sedimentation. An investment group now vows to return the area to its status as an "eco heaven.")

And soon enough, the first billboard announcing "Bali Coffee" makes a signpost for a road that leads farther up into thick mists, then down the backside of the ridge. On a clear day, the downward spiral of hairpin turns must offer stunning views of this round

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▶ To see more photos of upcountry Bali, click on **Asia.WSJ.com**.

Clockwise from left, kopi luwak—here at Munduk Moding Plantation, before and after removal and rinsing—is perhaps the world's most expensive coffee, though the civet is paid nothing for the initial processing; the picturesque lake called Danau Buyan; the main house at Munduk Moding, a resort as well as a coffee plantation

Kate Friend for The Wall Street Journal

bowl of a valley. But it's tough in the fog to clearly identify any of the local agriculture. Fortunately, a relatively new sign directs my driver to turn down a long driveway to the Munduk Moding Plantation. Billed as a "nature resort and spa," the place turns out to be a single, Dutch-style manor house, splendidly remodeled with four rooms up top, looking out over an infinity-style pool and its five hectares of working coffee farm.

But I still don't see any of the prized crop until the staff leads me along stone steps that make a circular path around the property. At long last, I've got beans to both sides of me, and these are in the raw, not freeze-dried or in measured espresso packets. All I have to do is lift the shiny leaves of these pleasant shrubs to see clumps of the green buds that have given humanity (including me) so much inspiration. How can so nerve-jangling a fruit come with such comfortingly pretty white flowers?

At the end of the trek, I'm joined by Made, the well-spoken, tie-wearing co-founder of the place. While sipping from his plantation's best brew, he explains that he and a Dutch partner invested six billion rupiahs ($640,000) not merely to turn a profit from tourism but to help save his home region's coffee tradition, hurt by a falling water table (coffee is a thirsty crop) and long stretch of weak coffee prices over the past decade. Locals say that coffee, originally brought by Dutch colonizers, is being slowly replaced by more lucrative crops such as cocoa.

Bedugul's sprawling wet market is a cool contrast to the sunny beaches below.

His coffee seems to go down very smoothly, until he informs me that what I am drinking is actually *kopi lubak*, more commonly *kopi luwak*, a rare treat. Brewed from beans gathered by neighboring farmers from the feces of a local, coffee-addicted species of civet (the pulpy part of the berry is digested, but the bean passes through whole), it's renowned for its lack of bitterness. (The beans do get a rinse before roasting.) I don't even realize until it's too late that I might have just downed some of the world's most expensive java (in this case, Bali).

Made's recommendation for a homemade coffee-roasting operation leads way down to the valley bottom. But after a sprint through a sudden late-afternoon downpour, I'm told the backyard operation is closed for a full-moon festival—one of the common, if charming, hazards in touring an island that operates on its own celestial calendar. In a pinch, Bali is usually able to provide one tourist catchall someplace. Around Munduk, it's the well-publicized Ngring Ngewedang, which I fortunately don't have to pronounce because it translates roughly as—surprise!—"enjoying coffee."

An open patio and covered tables command a great view (should the mist clear) from a strategic turn in the road, and, before actually partaking of more local brew (or taking home souvenir packets), Joni Suhadi, a relentless friendly manager who learned his English from years on a cruise ship, narrates a full tour of the facilities.

Down a path from the cafe is a shack devoted to coffee roasting, which is done over a wood fire as the beans roll in a crude and very rusty tumbler than reminds me of a big lettuce dryer. An energetic young couple, male and female, wait under a patch of thatched shade to raise oversize pestles and take up the vigorous pounding in a stone mortar that takes the place of an electric coffee grinder here. The result is a powder that concentrates every kick from the high-octane Robusta variety; the sample I finally get to sip is blastedly strong.

My pilgrimage to coffee country is made complete with a final stop at Ulu Danu, considered one of the island's more revered "water temples." It's quite a trek from the edge of Lake Bratan and doesn't look to be a very active, though a small group of pilgrims soon hops from the back of a pickup truck to leave offerings inside its weathered walls, slightly reminiscent of a prison yard. Still, the sculpted stone turrets are atmospheric as they face out on the shallow waters. And this blackened, slightly spooky shrine just may be the perfect place to placate the gods of caffeine and calm down after too much robusta.

John Krich is a writer based in Bangkok.

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GOOD WORKS

A Taiwan charity's global reach

By Simon Montlake

Shanlin, Taiwan and Cengkareng, Indonesia

Inside a tent, a poster on the wall tells a story of ruin and resilience: Aid workers in neat blue-and-white uniforms scrape gooey gray mud off an abandoned street in the wake of a destructive typhoon. Outside the tent is a picture of renewal: A new settlement rises in a broad green valley in the town of Shanlin.

The Great Love village, complete with earthquake-resistant schools, churches and houses, will eventually accommodate 1,500 families displaced when Typhoon Morakot pummeled Taiwan last August, triggering floods and landslides that killed 700 people and left tens of thousands homeless.

Many of the new Great Love residents, who began to move in last month, are Taiwanese aborigines who lived in marginal highland communities before the typhoon hit.

The land was set aside by the Taiwanese government for typhoon survivors. But the US$94 million project has been funded, designed and executed by Tzu Chi, a Taiwanese Buddhist charity known for its rapid response to the island's all-too frequent natural disasters. When it's not digging out mud-strewn villages, Tzu Chi keeps busy healing the sick, feeding the needy and recycling the island's trash.

In Taiwan, Tzu Chi volunteers in their white pants and navy-blue polo shirts are a familiar sight, and the group operates a popular cable-TV channel, also called Great Love. (The charity takes its name from one of its tenets: Every heart is capable of "priceless, great love.")

Largely unknown in the West, Tzu Chi has more regular donors (10 million, mostly Buddhist) and active volunteers (two million) than any other charity based in greater China. In 2008, it raised $314 million. It has built dozens of schools on the island, and six hospitals there bear the "Tzu Chi" name, which is a combination of two characters; the first is an honorific for mother, the second means charity.

But the reach of this 44-year-old charity now extends across much of the developing world, from Ethiopia to El Salvador to Myanmar, and it offers a view of how Asian philanthropy may evolve in an era of rising affluence. Roughly a third of Tzu Chi's regular donors live outside Taiwan; the charity has 399 offices in 47 countries running local projects

Her Rey-sheng, a spokesman for the Tzu Chi Foundation

and raising money for relief and development. This is foreign aid, with Taiwanese characteristics, and it has proven to be powerfully effective in providing disaster relief. What it isn't, however, is a platform for Buddhist proselytizing.

Until now, philanthropy in Asia has usually meant giving to local causes. By branching into cross-border humanitarian relief, Tzu Chi has become the first Asia-based Buddhist organization to enter a field dominated by large Western aid groups.

Asia "no longer has to be reliant on help from outside," says Richard Madsen, a sociologist at the University of California, San Diego, who has studied Taiwan's Buddhist nongovernmental organizations, among which Tzu Chi is the biggest and has the most global reach. As Asians become more affluent, he adds, "They can start to be generous and proactive to solve problems around the world."

Tzu Chi's roots lie on Taiwan's hardscrabble east coast. In 1966, Cheng Yen, a Buddhist nun now 72 years old, started an association of nuns and housewives who pooled their savings to help poor families. Dharma Master Cheng Yen, as she is known, has said that she was inspired by three visiting Catholic nuns who asked her what social services Taiwan's Buddhists provided.

The organization began to focus on offering Western medicine to needy Taiwanese and later opened a teaching hospital in the eastern city of Hualien. The hospital now has Asia's largest bone-marrow bank, which is open to anyone.

Tzu Chi has a full-time paid staff of 800 in Taiwan, excluding employees of the TV channel and hospital; they tap into its army of volunteers—many of them retirees—around the world. Its donors are global, too: For disaster relief outside Taiwan, much of the money is raised through local chapters, says Her Rey-sheng, a Tzu Chi spokesman based in Hualien.

The Great Love village in Cengkareng, Indonesia, which houses 800 families displaced from Jakarta slums by flooding in 2002, was paid for entirely by donations from Indonesians—including the Widjajas, the ethnic-Chinese family behind agribusiness conglomerate Sinar Mas Group. Tzu Chi has 35,000 regular donors in Indonesia and an annual local budget of more than $10 million. The Jakarta chapter runs an Indonesian affiliate of Great Love TV and sends relief teams of Indonesian physicians to disaster zones such as the earthquake-hit city of Padang on Sumatra Island, where more than 1,000 people died last October.

The Cengkareng village, which opened in 2003, boasts a recycling center, a spacious school and a 31-bed hospital that treats patients—including nonresidents—for free.

On a recent morning, Hanafi, a 76-year-old retired civil servant who goes by one name and lives in a nearby town, sat waiting for a cataract screening on the third floor of the Cengkareng hospital. He had not been able to see out of his cloudy eyes in several months, he said. After a local doctor at a public clinic told him about the free surgery at this hospital, his daughter brought him in.

While he waited his turn, he prayed that the Indonesia Tzu Chi Hospital doctors could restore his sight. Like most Indonesians, Mr. Hanafi is a Muslim. Told that Tzu Chi is a

Chris Stowers for The Wall Street Journal

Clockwise from top: Hsieh Ching-kuei, Tzu Chi's international relief director, at a foundation recycling-and-blanket-distribution center near Taipei—the blankets feature the foundation logo, eight petals of a lotus flower meant to represent Buddhism's eight-fold path, and a sailboat, signifying the ship of compassion that Tzu Chi steers to save all beings that suffer; Ing Jen-zhu, 58, a survivor of Typhoon Morakot, works at the construction site of the Great Love village in Shanlin; a village building under construction—some residents moved in after Chinese New Year.

Buddhist group, he seems unruffled. "The important thing is that it's a good organization," he says. "I don't know anything about the religion."

That suits Tzu Chi just fine. It forbids proselytizing by volunteers, though anyone is welcome to join the Buddhist prayer sessions held at its local chapters, its hospitals and at disaster sites. People of other faiths aren't excluded from the charity's lay activities, such as disaster relief. Indeed, Tzu Chi's volunteer medical corps in Indonesia is mostly Muslim.

Such localization holds the key to Tzu Chi's growth, says Mark O'Neill, author of "A Silent Revolution—the Tzu Chi Story." Its offices around the world are headed by Taiwanese expatriates or overseas Chinese. Ethnic-Chinese minorities in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines often are among the first to volunteer. Western relief groups such as Mercy Corps and Save the Children often coordinate with their respective embassies in disaster areas, but Tzu Chi doesn't. In fact, in many countries where Taiwan has no official ties and thus no embassy, including the U.S., it still maintains a presence.

At times, this isolation can be an advantage. Within days of the massive cyclone that struck the southern coastline of Myanmar in May 2008, Tzu Chi and another Taiwanese Buddhist charity got permission from Myanmar's military government to fly in water and tarpaulins for shelter. Most Western NGOs were shut out for up to a month by the junta, wary of help from Western powers.

Tzu Chi's low-key charity work is a kind of Taiwanese "soft power," says Mr. Madsen, the sociologist. This is important because the island has little international clout today. The United Nations admitted China and unseated Taiwan in 1971, and in 1979, the U.S.—the key to the island's support internationally—formally established diplomatic relations with the mainland. Taiwan was effectively sidelined.

In Taiwan, Tzu Chi keeps its distance from the island's fractious politics, which helps free it to do what it wants as an aid organization. While other Taiwanese Buddhist aid groups are aligned with political parties (Fo Guang Shan, or Buddha's Light Mountain, for example, has ties to the Kuomingtang party), Tzu Chi is scrupulous about not taking sides, says Mr. Madsen.

That approach is an asset in mainland

Clockwise from left: Taiwanese aboriginee Liu Wu Shou-mei, 54, lost her leg during Typhoon Morakot; Zhang Yi-zhi, 75, an aboriginal chief, wears a traditional hunter's deer hat; Tzu Chi volunteers, in blue-and-white uniforms, visit the Shanlin resettlement village construction site.

China, where Tzu Chi has been expanding gradually since 1991. It registered in 2008 as a foreign NGO, and now has projects in 25 provinces, says Mr. Her, the spokesman. China holds the greatest potential for the charity, given ties of culture, language and family. A large number of Taiwanese live and work there, and the local chapter has some 20,000 volunteers, Taiwanese and mainland Chinese.

Tzu Chi "can build a love bridge across the strait" between Taiwan and China, says Mr. Her. But there are still many curbs on what NGOs can do in China, he says. For instance, Tzu Chi must get permission to solicit donations for specific projects, which leaves it largely dependent on funds from Taiwan.

Andre Laliberte, an associate professor at the University of Ottawa who has researched Tzu Chi's China programs, says the faith-based foundation may be overly optimistic about what it can accomplish in China. "They wish they could build hospitals and have all the activities that they have in Taiwan," he says. "But it's not going to happen," given Beijing's wariness of NGOs and organizations with a religious base.

Still, after the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, Tzu Chi was the first foreign aid group to get relief workers on site. Since then, it has been busy building 13 schools, many of which will be finished this year.

In monetary terms, Tzu Chi is a small fish in the global aid pond. Other organizations, such as Oxfam, CARE and Doctors Without Borders, raise more money, reach more places and employ more expert staff. But the corps of volunteers at Tzu Chi—who work for free—give this group its strength.

Overseas-Taiwanese entrepreneurs and educated professionals form the backbone of the global volunteer network, which works to build schools in Turkey, dig wells in Ethiopia and deliver babies in China. Local chapters—all run by volunteers—can be found world-wide, from La Paz, Bolivia, to Cape Town, South Africa, as well as in the U.S. and Canada. Since 1998, Tzu Chi has mobilized 15,000 doctors and nurses from around the globe to provide free medical services in dozens of countries.

Tzu Chi volunteers pay their own way, and there is a waiting list of Taiwanese wanting to join aid missions overseas, says Mr. O'Neill, the author. "Without these volunteers, the foundation would not be able to accomplish many of its missions," he says.

Chris Stowers for The Wall Street Journal

When Typhoon Morakot hit Taiwan last August, Tzu Chi was among the first to send relief supplies to affected highlands. It has raised $143 million in reconstruction funds from people in 52 countries, including survivors of other disasters, according to Mr. Her.

After Taiwan's government said that landslide-prone villages could not be rebuilt, Tzu Chi went to work at the new, government-sanctioned site. But many victims bemoan the abandonment, and a minority have refused to sign a form relinquishing their right to return to their old homes.

Until the Tzu Chi project opens, most of the displaced are in temporary government and army-run shelters. At a sleepy army base, Liu Wu Shou-mei, 54, hobbles gingerly. Her village was buried in mud, and she and 600 other residents spent three days and nights huddled on a rain-lashed mountainside. Her left leg had to be amputated above the knee. Mrs. Liu regrets the move to the lowlands but sees no way back. "Our hearts are in the mountains but we have to face reality," she says.

Some Taiwanese NGOs have criticized Tzu Chi for pressuring survivors into signing the consent forms. Tzu Chi officials say it's voluntary and point out that the government set the guidelines for where private charities can provide permanent shelter in the area.

Self-sacrifice and humility are among the foundation's core beliefs. It's a draw for Tzu Chi's paid staffers—many of whom are mid-career professionals who took a substantial pay cut to join. Not all are Buddhist; staff members in the U.S., for instance, are mostly Christian.

Mr. Her, a former TV news anchor who works full-time as a Tzu Chi spokesman, reports directly to "the Master" in Hualien. He says he doesn't miss his high-flying job. "I earn less, but life has more value," he says.

One of Tzu Chi's core principles is that relief supplies—blankets, food parcels—should be handed over personally, with a bow, by volunteers. The foundation feels this expresses sincerity and gratitude, in line with the movement's teachings. That's how Hsieh Ching-kuei, a former banker who is now head of international relief at Tzu Chi, found himself dancing with North Koreans in 2001.

It had taken a year and a half to persuade officials in Pyongyang to allow Tzu Chi to distribute rice directly to malnourished villagers, rather than hand it to the government. When the day finally came, more than 50 uniformed Tzu Chi volunteers stood in a row, facing the assembled villagers. Before the handover they read a letter from Master Cheng Yen and sang a song. Villagers hugged them and put on a show, says Mr. Hsieh. "When they open up, they're really good dancers," he adds.

But that kind of access isn't guaranteed. When Tzu Chi went back to North Korea in 2008, new officials in charge insisted that food aid be turned over to a government-authorized organization.

Mr. Hsieh joined Tzu Chi in 1995 after 10 years as head of Merrill Lynch's wealth-management division in Taiwan. When catastrophe strikes, Mr. Hsieh jumps on a plane to coordinate the flow of supplies, logistics and manpower. He tries to source goods nearby, to boost the local economy. In some trouble spots, Tzu Chi teams up with relief agencies that have better access. In mid-1990s Rwanda, for example, it worked with Médecins du Monde in post-genocide relief efforts.

Over the years, Tzu Chi has learned a lot from the "big names" in humanitarian relief, says Mr. Hsieh. In general, his approach to aid is the more, the merrier. "If this is a business, you want to be the only producer. But in this industry you welcome everyone."

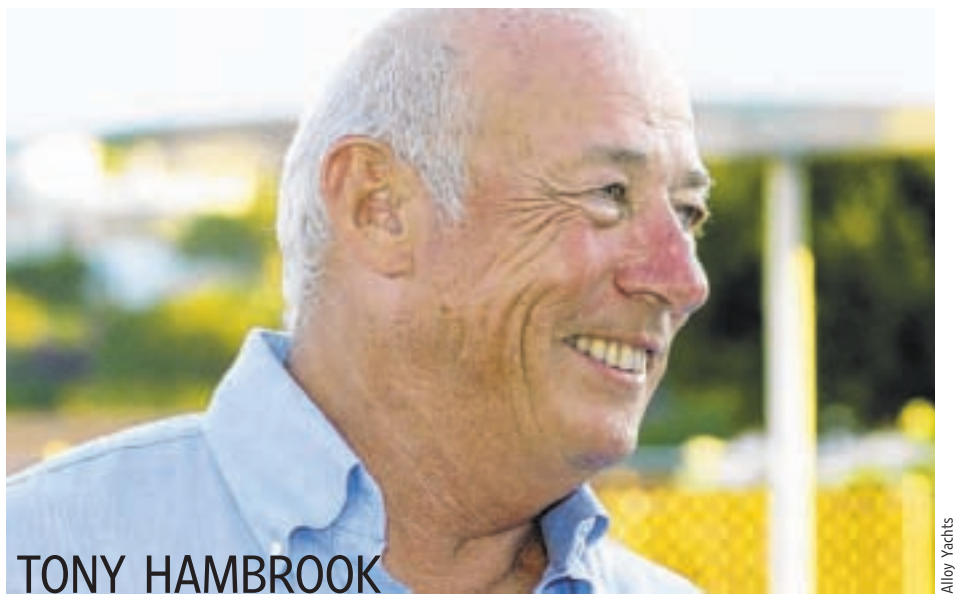
Sometimes that means making friends with the enemy. After anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta in May 1998, Tzu Chi began distributing rice in poor neighborhoods, where anti-Chinese sentiments ran deepest. The idea was to break a cycle of hatred by putting an ethnic-Chinese face to charity.

Though thousands of Chinese-Indonesians fled the country in the wake of the May Riots, which also hit other cities, Tzu Chi stayed. When the 2002 floods inundated thousands of squatters on the banks of the Angke River, Tzu Chi volunteers organized medical services and a clean-up campaign. The wealthy Widjaja family consulted Master Cheng Yen and began to call in favors from other Indonesian tycoons. They helped raise $7 million to build new homes for the flood victims.

Today, the Cengkareng Great Love village—a cluster of five-story apartment buildings—is thriving. Indonesian government officials have come to glean lessons for future postdisaster relocations, says Hong Tjhin, an ethnic-Chinese Tzu Chi staff member in Jakarta. He thinks Indonesia's ethnic-Chinese elite has much to learn from the project, too. "We have to give back," he says. "It's only natural and proper."

Simon Montlake is a writer based in Bangkok.

WHAT'S NEXT



Alloy Yachts

By Steve Mollman

Growing up in the rural town of Motueka on New Zealand's South Island, Tony Hambrook picked up a lot of hands-on skills in his father's workshop. He learned about pumps, fans and metals while working on things like engines, crop-irrigation systems and go-karts.

Today, as managing director of the New Zealand luxury-boat builder Alloy Yachts, Mr. Hambrook oversees teams of men handcrafting what he calls the "Bentleys of the sea," the custom-made sailing yachts that are the company's forte.

Building things, as it turns out, is Mr. Hambrook's thing: Since he took over the company two decades ago, the yacht maker has grown in size to 430 employees from 50. It still produces the same number of boats every year—two or three—but the vessels are bigger.

In the 1990s, Alloy's yachts measured up to 36 meters. Now, the company—whose clients hail mostly from Europe and North America—won't make anything under 40 meters; many of its boats are as long as 68 meters, and it has several orders for 80-meter crafts. (A boat over 30 meters is generally recognized as a superyacht.) And the price is high: A 50-meter Alloy yacht costs about US$40 million.

Another in a series of articles pondering the shape of things to come

Mr. Hambrook was in the business of building free-standing fireplaces when he decided it'd be fun to build a boat. So he put together a 16-meter sailing yacht and in 1979 set off with his wife and a volunteer crew on a three-and-a-half year cruise of the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean.

Back on shore, he was a boating consultant until he joined Alloy Yachts in 1986 as a production manager. He became managing director three years later. Since then, he's turned heads in the yachting world with his ability to fulfill unusual requests from clients. Helipad on a sailing vessel? Done. Walls of stingray leather? Can do.

In 2006, he was made an officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for his contributions to the country's marine industry. And last year, the International Superyacht Society, a trade group, awarded the 63-year-old Kiwi its top leadership award for Alloy's innovation in sail-handling equipment as well as for its commitment to designing and manufacturing as much as possible in-house. "We do not outsource if we can avoid it," he says.

When we caught up with Mr. Hambrook, he was in Auckland's Viaduct Harbour overseeing the final touches on the 58-meter Kokomo, an Australasia customer's third order. We asked the boat builder about what's next in the world of sailing yachts.

What's hot in yacht interiors?

We've had requests that are hard to imagine, all the way down to walls being covered in stingray skins. The potential is limitless, and the owners are wealthy enough that cost isn't a consideration. Having said that, the trend at the moment is to be a little bit more minimalist, with cleaner, sharper lines as the dominant style. This yacht [the Kokomo] has got a 60-inch TV that has a piece of artwork sliding up to cover it....I think on this boat there are about 12 television sets.

What other trends have you noticed?

The quality levels are becoming more and more demanding. The paint finish is now as good as you'd find on any automobile. The noise and vibration levels are so that now if you can hear anything when you're inside there's something wrong. That trend is just going to continue.

Will yachts become more environmentally friendly?

There's already a lot of effort going into it: the fuel consumption, the insulation values in the boats to cut down the air-conditioning loads, the recycling of waste. And there's a trend toward more sailboats versus motor boats.

What are must-have toys these days?

Kayaks...it's easy for anyone to paddle a kayak and it's quite sociable in that two or three or half a dozen people can go out in kayaks and talk to one another and explore a coastline. A few years ago we didn't fit them at all and now every boat we launch has got kayaks on board.

Will demand for on-board helicopter pads grow in popularity?

Not hugely. A helicopter's got a limited range. They're not particularly convenient. I think the trend in sophisticated tenders [smaller boats carried on the yacht] is going to develop to a much greater extent. Tenders now are getting up around 12 or 15 meters. They're large, and very comfortable.

How might technology factor into maintenance?

It wouldn't be a surprise if in 10 years' time you sort of pull into a marina and you plug [the boat] into the analyzing computer and it tells you what needs to be done, if anything.

The boats we're building have 250 different alarms and status functions that we monitor and that get downloaded automatically through the satellite system to our office. So we know if a boat's up in Singapore, for example, and the motor is running a bit hot. We would know within 24 hours. That's vastly different from what it was a few years ago.

Will security issues become more important?

In five years it'll be rare to have a boat where security has not been discussed at some length. Every boat we build now has got cameras. Half of them have got [intruder] alarms on the hatches and in the deck, and that's been getting more popular. In about 10 years every boat will have it. There are companies that are marketing a Kevlar material that can be fitted inside the hold designed to stop rifle or machine-gun fire.

Will we see more large sailing yachts?

There are only three or four new 80-meter boats out there world-wide. I can see the number going up quite significantly. In 10 years time I wouldn't be at all surprised to see five times that number.

Steve Mollman is a writer based in Asia.

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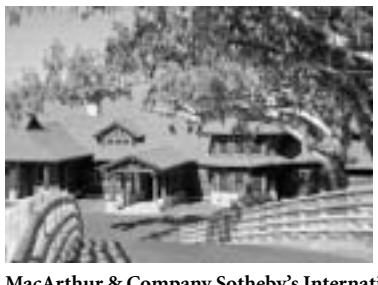

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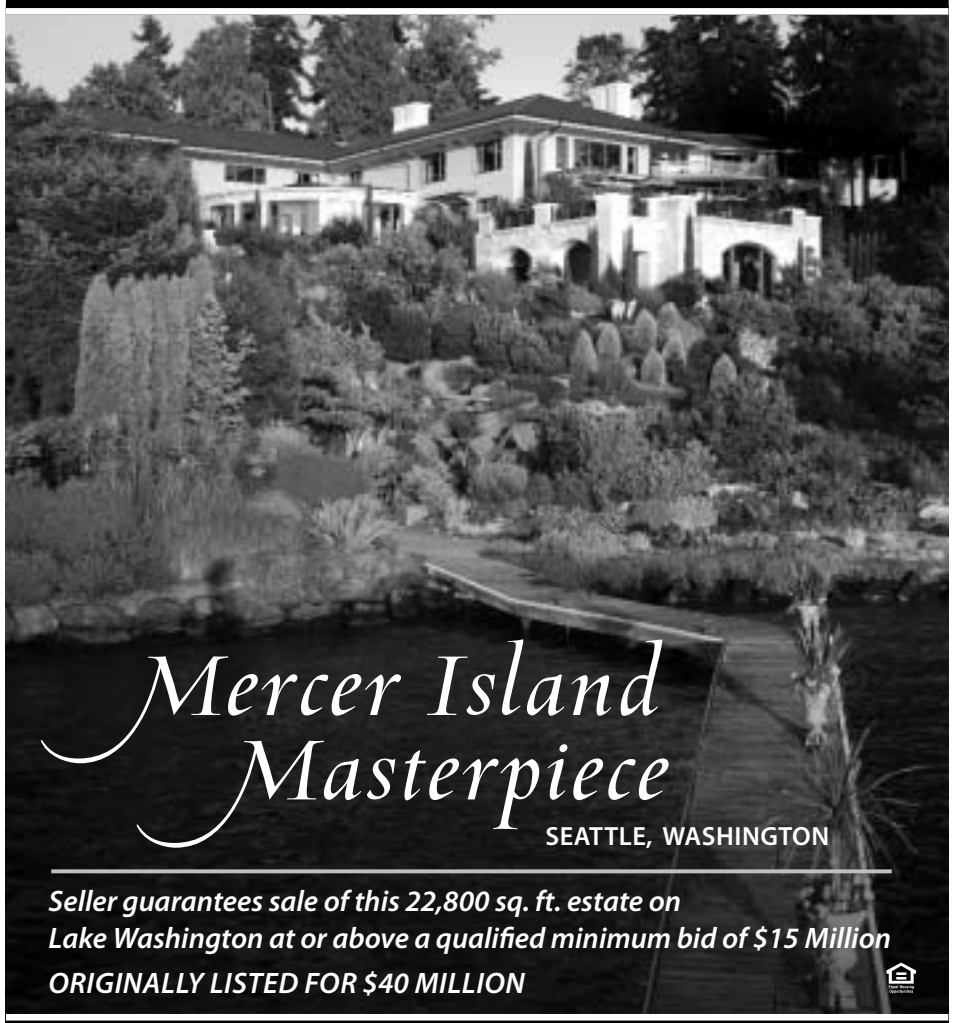

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FILM

Meryl Streep and Alec Baldwin play clean in 'It's Complicated.'

Stop-action magic

A fantastic 'Mr. Fox'; 'It's Complicated' begs simplifying

By Joe Morgenstern

20th Century Fox ('Fox'); Universal Studios ('Complicated')

Suitably, 'Fantastic Mr. Fox' stars a fox, though with the voice of George Clooney.

Life is full of surprises. The best one I've had in a good while is "Fantastic Mr. Fox," Wes Anderson's stop-action animated version of the classic children's novel by Roald Dahl. Who could have guessed—certainly not me—that animation and Mr. Anderson, most recently the director of "The Darjeeling Limited," would be an inspired, and mutually inspiring, match? Instead of the vapid motion-capture process of "A Christmas Carol," he and his collaborators give us captivating entertainment.

The script, which the director wrote with Noah Baumbach, takes elaborate liberties with its source material. Now the bane of three farmers' existence is a bushy-tailed newspaper columnist voiced by George Clooney. (His wife, voiced by Meryl Streep, had been urging him to stop stealing birds and find a new line of work.) If that sounds precious or improbable, the film is all of that and more, the more being foxily funny. The visual style is a radical departure from the original Quentin Blake illustrations, but a hugely endearing one that's rendered in exotic colors, stuffed with more details than a Richard Scarry page and popping with zestful inventions.

So who's the film's audience? The voice cast alone should be a draw for adults—not just Mr. Clooney, who gives a commanding (no kidding) comic performance, but Ms. Streep, Bill Murray, Michael Gambon, Willem Dafoe, Jason Schwartzman, Owen Wilson; they're all delightful in their respective ways. And the look of the film should enchant kids who may be too young to savor the sophisticated script. All I can say for certain is that I didn't expect to be the audience for this lovely oddity, but I was.

'It's Complicated'

It isn't hard to imagine a Gallic knock-off of "It's Complicated" played as shallow, stylish farce. Ten years after her divorce, Jane, a middle-age mother of three, crosses paths with Jake, her ex-husband, and his young, sexy wife. Unexpectedly, Jake's love for Jane rekindles and they have a passionate affair, forcing Jane to choose between being her ex's mistress or her own woman, which she thought she had been all along.

In this original American version, the filmmaker Nancy Meyers plays it as a comedy with lavish trappings—the setting is mostly the upscale California city of Santa Barbara—but a comedy about real feelings, deep confusions, old regrets and the yearning of those no longer young for a new lease on life. After listening to Jane and Jake talk it out in the interminable process of working it out—they explore their relationship as exhaustively, and exhaustingly, as any kids on Facebook—I found myself wishing for more shallows and fewer depths.

That's unfair to Meryl Streep, who portrays Jane with infectious humor. She's endearing when she announces cheerfully, "I'm a bit of a slut"; when she says to Alec Baldwin's Jake, "You're an adulterer and I am...an awful person, basically" (we know she's not), or when she begs her shrink for permission to pursue the affair and thanks him, with a you've-given-me-such-a-gift gesture, when he simply allows that it can't hurt. And even though Ms. Streep looks radiantly lovely at the age she is, she makes her character's vulnerability both funny and touching in a bedroom encounter during which Jake will see Jane standing naked for the first time in a decade.

But it's also unfair to ask Ms. Streep, as the movie does, to sustain vitality and spontaneity in the midst of serial contrivances—smoking a joint, using a Web cam to disastrous effect, talking ritual talk about food and home improvement. (Jake himself is a contrivance, though Mr. Baldwin mostly manages to make him a likable one.) Steve Martin plays an architect who wants to bring true love into Jane's life. Zoe Kazan is sweetly quirky as the divorced couple's younger daughter. Lake Bell fails to find a scintilla of humanity in Agness, Jake's icy young wife, but John Toll's cinematography compensates for that, and a lot more, by bathing the production in a soft and welcome warmth.

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Fast swing, quick rise

Hard-hitting Dustin Johnson could be the next big thing

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Dustin Johnson, with his win at the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am last month, became the first player since Tiger Woods to log victories in each of his first three years on Tour. He won the AT&T last year, too, and the Turning Stone Resort Championship in 2008.

That puts him, at age 25, near the top of the list of the world's young golf studs, along with Rory McIlroy, 20, of Northern Ireland, Martin Kaymer, 25, of Germany and Ryo Ishikawa, 18, of Japan (none of whom has yet won on the U.S. PGA Tour). Among Americans, Anthony Kim, 24, and Rickie Fowler, 21, might qualify for the list, but Mr. Kim has won only two events (both in 2008; he did finish second in last weekend's Honda Classic) and Mr. Fowler, the charismatic rookie, remains pure promise.

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

"A lot of the young players are starting to step up and really play. It'll be fun," Mr. Johnson said with competitive zeal a couple of weeks ago when I presented him with this list of potential career-long rivals.

The woods are filled, of course, with formerly promising young talents still metaphorically looking for their golf balls: Ricky Barnes, Ty Tryon and Bobby Clampett, to name a few. But three wins is not a bad lifetime total—50-year-old Tom Lehman, with $21 million in career earnings, has five—and Mr. Johnson exudes natural athletic ability.

I watched him play indoor pickup basketball here. It was his regular twice-a-week game during off weeks—he finds treadmills boring—against some serious local talent, but no one would fail to identify the professional athlete in the mix. At 1.93 meters tall and a lean 90 kilograms, he loped effortlessly down the court, dribbled with both hands and passed without looking. During a break I asked if he could dunk. He said his legs weren't in great basketball shape, then, with two quick steps, slammed the ball home as easily as an office worker tossing a ball of paper into the waste can.

Athletic genes run in the family. Grandfather Art Whisnant was a college basketball star and his father, Scott, started in four sports in high school. But Mr. Johnson, who began hanging out as a young boy at the golf club where his father worked in Columbia, South Carolina, narrowed his focus to golf after he made the high-school varsity squad in seventh grade, and started getting recognition. "I figured golf more than any other sport gave me the best chance of playing professionally," he said. "If you want to play at the top level, you really can't play but one sport anymore."

Dustin Johnson working on his swing and working out at his gym with a medicine ball and a Bosu balance trainer; his exercises focus on improving his balance, posture, stability and core strength.

At Coastal Carolina University near Myrtle Beach he was the three-time Big South Conference Player of the Year. After competing (against Mr. McIlroy, among others) on the victorious 2007 U.S. Walker Cup team, he turned pro and made it onto the PGA Tour through Qualifying School in his first try. I happened to follow Mr. Johnson for most of a round at that Q School, in December 2007, and was immediately struck by his fast, decisive play and fearlessness.

"You can't teach what Dustin has," his coach, Allen Terrell, said then. "He gets up for the big moments, he gets excited, but he doesn't get nervous. He stays in the moment and never gets rattled." Though sure of himself, Mr. Johnson is anything but cocky. The confidence he has in his talent shows up subtly, in the slouchy, half-sleepy way he both moves and talks, often spitting tobacco juice into a plastic soda bottle.

On the course, Mr. Johnson ranked third in driving distance on Tour last year, with a 308-yard average, trailing the leaders, Robert Garrigus and Bubba Watson, by only four yards and three yards, respectively. In the category "percentage of all drives over 300 yards," he was tops by a big margin, at 53.12%, the only player over 50%. Partly that's because he seldom pulls out his three wood when he can reasonably use his driver, and partly because when he does choose to go long, he consistently hits it on the screws.

Mr. Johnson offers no magic explanation for his ability to hit bombs. "I just always hit it a long way. I never had to struggle with distance," he said. Sprinters respond much the same way when asked about their speed: They were always fast. Mr. Johnson's height is an advantage, no doubt, since tall golfers' long arms and wider swing arcs make it easier to generate clubhead speed. But size isn't determinative. Honda Classic winner Camilo Villegas, who ranks second on the Tour in driving distance so far this year (Mr. Johnson is again third), is only 1.75 meters tall and the long-hitting Mr. McIlroy is just 178.

For all his nonchalance, Mr. Johnson works on his driving. "The key to hitting the ball far, No. 1, is hitting it solid," he explained at a practice tee at the Tournament Players Club of Myrtle Beach, his home course since college.

He recently financed the installation of a golf gym at the club for himself and the Coastal Carolina golf team, and he spends a lot of time there, balancing on one leg while lifting weights or turning with medicine balls. The goal is to improve his balance, posture, stability and core strength.

For Mr. Johnson, posture is essential both for longevity (his driver swing speed exceeds 190 kilometers an hour, among the fastest in golf, and takes its toll on his body) and as a defense against a right knee that wants to shoot forward, toward the ball, on his downswing. "When I'm not swinging well, that's the cause of most of my problems," he said. The dipping knee may be a response to standing up too tall on the takeaway; the move gets him back down to the ball. But whatever the cause, it tends to push his hands too far ahead of the ball at impact and produce shots that fly off unpredictably in either direction.

"You want your shots all to move one way, in my case to the left, with a draw," he said. "If I can keep my lower body stable, without going up or down, or sliding forward or back, I'll hit a good, controlled shot." He said he likes the image of trying to swing as if he were inside a phone booth, without hitting the walls.

Mr. Terrell said Mr. Johnson's short game and putting are exceptional, because of his hand-eye coordination, but his wedge game, from 150 yards in, needs work. More than anything, however, Mr. Johnson plays by instinct. When I asked how he fades the ball, which he can do with confidence, he said, "I don't really know. I just...I just make it fade." The great feel player Sam Snead gave a similar answer.

It will be interesting in the years ahead, as wealth and the tempting complexities of fame accrue, to see whether Mr. Johnson can sustain his game at the keen level he has shown so far. He has had a couple of brushes with the law, one in high school and then last winter for driving while intoxicated, both of which he told me he regrets and has learned from. But golf careers are long-term affairs. "He's still a puppy, only 25," Mr. Terrell said. Athletically, he would seem to have no limitations.

Logan Mock-Bunting/Getty Images for The Wall Street Journal

A Cultural Conversation with Jia Zhangke / *By Emily Parker*

Changing China From Within

New York

Jia Zhangke finds the calmer moments in China's breakneck growth. "I focus on how individuals are quietly affected by these changes," the director says. "You have to use slowness to capture the fast."

Mr. Jia's films are indeed slow. There are long silences and meandering conversations. The camera lingers on faces, roads and, at one point, a telephone. There are romantic scenes, but not of the Hollywood variety. The protagonist of Mr. Jia's 1997 film,

Jia Zhangke: A Retrospective
The Museum of Modern Art
Through March 20

"Xiaowu," is a pickpocket who wears ill-fitting blazers and oversized glasses. He falls hard for a karaoke hostess, which leads to the following conversation:

"Will you be my man now?"

"If you like."

"You're my man now!"

"Fine."

"Really?"

"OK."

I meet Mr. Jia in a conference room at the Museum of Modern Art, which is hosting the director's first retrospective in the U.S. Mr. Jia is dressed in black and wearing sunglasses indoors, which I chalk up to his status as a star director. He later explains that he spent too many hours editing in front of a computer screen, and now his eyes are overly sensitive to light.

The retrospective's organizer, Jytte Jensen, calls Mr. Jia "one of the most significant chroniclers of our time." She says Mr. Jia re-creates the pasts of those Chinese who have been "written totally out of history, who have no place in this new, modern world . . . people who have no tradition of being depicted in Chinese art."

The 39-year-old director grew up in Fenyang, in China's northern Shanxi province. Mr. Jia films the kind of people he grew up around—petty thieves, laid-off workers, aimless youths. The Chinese government has not always appreciated this realist approach. In 1999, after "Xiaowu," Chinese authorities banned Mr. Jia from making films. This was partly because Mr. Jia never went through the required process of clearing his works with official censors. He believes that the film's content also played a role. "Xiaowu" humanized a thief and "gave him a voice."

Mr. Jia ignored the government ban and proceeded to surreptitiously shoot and edit "Platform" (2000), an epic film that follows a performance troupe from 1979 to 1989. But Mr. Jia soon grew tired of making films on the sly. "The World" (2004) was his first government-sanctioned film. The films that followed, "24 City," "Still Life" and "I Wish I Knew," were also made with official approval.

Why did he decide to go above board? "If my films can't be shown in China, they have zero impact," Mr. Jia explains.

But in deciding to comply with the authorities, Mr. Jia weighed in on a larger debate: Can you produce great art without freedom? "It's the other way around," Mr. Jia corrects me. "A society can't obtain freedom without art." He explains, "If we live in an environment that lacks freedom, art is the most direct way to promote change and give people more room to live freely." Mr. Jia says film directors can highlight social issues and make them a topic of public debate.

He continues to do this for those Chinese left on the platform as the development train rockets past. "Still Life" focuses on the Yangtze River's Three Gorges Dam, which displaced more than a million people. "24 City" features interviews with workers at a factory that was torn down to make way for luxury apartments. That film combines real testimonials with monologues read by actors. One of the monologues blends the true stories of many different people. Mr. Jia explains: "It's not anthropology, not history." Instead, his films reflect a collective experience. His larger goal is to preserve the individual stories behind China's transformation. He says that for his most recent work, "I Wish I Knew," he interviewed people about their memories of Shanghai, another rapidly changing city.

Zina Saunders

The authorities may tolerate Mr. Jia's work, but that doesn't mean they like it. His 2006 "Still Life" fared poorly at the Chinese box office, in part, Mr. Jia says, because movie theaters would show his films only in the morning or, say, at 2 p.m. "There was concern that 'Still Life' was 'unsafe,'" he says, because it reflects China's "real situation."

He also had to compete with the likes of Zhang Yimou's big-budget historical drama "The Curse of the Golden Flower." (Mr. Zhang, the designer of the Beijing Olympics' opening ceremonies, has a much friendlier relationship with the Chinese government.)

Mr. Jia says there is a "war" between independent and mainstream, or "monopoly," films. China's independent film movement, which sprang to life in the 1990s, has a lot of catching up to do. From the early 1990s to about 2000, young directors' most valuable, dynamic work had no way of being shown publicly, Mr. Jia says. "And during those 10 years, the commercial films were cultivating their audience. . . . So when we were finally able to show our work a decade later, we confronted an audience that had gotten used to Hollywood-style and Hong Kong martial-arts films."

In China, art and politics are intertwined. Last summer, Mr. Jia pulled out of the Melbourne International Film Festival because he did not wish to appear alongside Rebiya Kadeer, the exiled Uighur leader whom Beijing sees as an instigator of violence in Xinjiang. (Ms. Kadeer was a subject of a documentary in the festival.) "I'm not her supporter," Mr. Jia says of Ms. Kadeer. "If I went I would be seen as a supporter." He will face similar choices down the line. He says it's not clear if China is becoming more open or more tightly controlled. "It's always vacillating," he says.

Mr. Jia expresses the challenges of working in this environment in his six-minute film "The Condition of Dogs" (2001). He shot a real-life dog market in Datong, a city in Shanxi province, focusing his gaze on a cloth sack filled with puppies. The bag writhes and the animals whine. Eventually one dog chews a hole in the bag and pokes his head through.

Mr. Jia says that "The Condition of Dogs" reflects his own challenges as a filmmaker in China. "Even in a closed, dark sack, a small dog can chew his way out," he explains. He adds, with a happy laugh, "He's a rebellious dog!"

But what about the others? I ask. What about those who are still in the dark?

Mr. Jia responds, "Someone just needs the courage to go first."

Ms. Parker is a senior fellow at Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations.

The Ravishing of Rob Pattinson

By Nancy deWolf Smith

In a recent survey of 130,000 women by iVillage Entertainment, 87% said they would trade their husband for British actor Robert Pattinson. Clearly, some of them were kidding. The rest will just have to accept that the 23-year-old Mr. Pattinson, like the romantic vampire Edward Cullen he embodies in the "Twilight" movie series, is unlikely ever to cross their paths outside the realm of dreams.

Until now, most of those dreams were sweet or at least private ones. Yet as Mr. Pattinson made the rounds in New York this week to promote his new, nonvampire movie, "Remember Me," the spectacle of his sexploitation—how else to put it?—was grotesque. What's being wrecked is the essence of his appeal, and he's really not old enough to safeguard it.

Whatever Pattinson-appreciation is built on, the gateway drug for most women (and fewer men) is Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight," a classic saga of young love. The twist is that Edward hasn't been

Getty Images

Sex-mad humans v. the fictional vampire.

human since he was bitten by a vampire in 1918, and yet he soulfully strives to protect Bella, the ordinary girl who returns his affection, from his own monstrous fate.

A beautiful man with the will and strength to maintain eternal devotion? A few joyless types missed the big picture and veered off on tangents about stalking and other tedious subjects. But most girls got it instantly, and adult women perked up as if from a torpor—even if they could only sneak off to Robsessedpattinson.com and other Web sites after the children and a resentful husband or boyfriend were asleep. Then, they talk about Mr. Pattinson as if he were their own personal brand of heroin. "I'm addicted," a mother of four laments. "When will it end?" "O.M.G. When will we wake up?" types someone else. "When he's 40? 50?"

After more than a year of mainstream-culture derision aimed at so-called twitards, vindication of a kind arrived in the March issue of a trendy men's magazine, Details. There, a headline finally asks the $64,000 question: "So the Woman You Love Has the Hots for a Vampire. What Does That Say About You?" Nothing good. But the worm turns again elsewhere in the same issue, in a creepy photo spread where Mr. Pattinson appears fully clad but looking dwarfed and diminished by a towering phalanx of naked female models.

Of this demeaning experience, Mr. Pattinson later had the insouciance to remark that it was made bearable by a hangover. The fangs are out for him, however. As one woman blogged about the Details shoot, he is now "the most objectified young man of modern times." Throw in the sexual catcalling and increasingly smutty questions from interviewers, and he probably "spends half his life having femininity (for good or bad) thrust in his face."

Jimmy Fallon, bless him, put his guest up a tree for a funny skit Monday. Back in the studio, though, the banshees wailed so crazily that both men looked wary and Mr. Pattinson said: "Help."

Fat chance. On ABC's "The View" Tuesday, even the presence of Mr. Pattinson's parents and sisters in the audience could not prevent the lady interviewers of a certain age from instigating talk of intimate body parts, male and female.

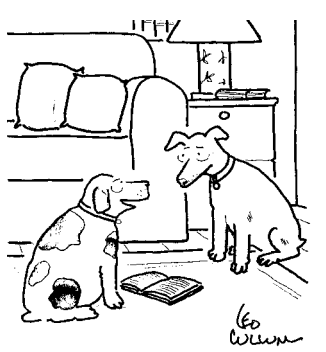
All this, and worse, is now rushing toward a man whose greatest asset has been not just a handsome face, but an apparent abundance of youthful innocence. It has allowed young girls to imagine a happy future, and moved older women to tears with the memory of a happier past.

Now that Mr. Pattinson is a bona fide Hollywood commodity, a maw is opening to devour him. Even Edward Cullen couldn't stop that.

Ms. Smith is a member of the Journal's editorial board and a TV critic.

Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"...and where would Darwin have been without 'The Beagle'?"

Art history on the march

At 88, pop pioneer Richard Hamilton is getting shows all over

By Paul Levy

Oxfordshire, England

One day a couple of weeks ago, the "father of pop art," Richard Hamilton, told me he had only just dispatched the van containing the work for his brand-new show, "Modern Moral Matters," at the Serpentine Gallery until April 25. With amused surprise that he'd met this particular deadline, he said "the paint's still wet on the new pictures."

His first major London show since 1992, it includes his 1964 "Portrait of Hugh Gaitskell as a Famous Monster of Filmland," in which the then-leader of the Labour Party was depicted as the Phantom of the Opera for his opposition to nuclear disarmament, which Mr. Hamilton passionately supported.

Also reflecting Mr. Hamilton's left-wing libertarianism—and showing that his strongest suit is satire—there is his famous "Swingeing London 67" (1968-69), based on a photograph of Mick Jagger and the late Robert Fraser (then Mr. Hamilton's art dealer). The two men had been arrested in a notorious drug bust; Mr. Jagger has his hands raised to shield his face from the flashbulbs, and Mr. Fraser, because he's handcuffed to him, is perforce making the same gesture of celebrity. The image registers Mr. Hamilton's indignation that Mr. Fraser served a swingeing (severe) six months' sentence for "innocently pleading guilty."

Mr. Hamilton blazed to pop art fame in 1956, with his collage from American magazines, "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?" with its muscleman provocatively holding a Tootsie Pop and woman with large, bare breasts wearing a lampshade hat, surrounded by emblems of 1950s affluence from a vacuum cleaner to a large canned ham. It wasn't just this that made Mr. Hamilton a household name—he also designed the sleeve for the Beatles's "White Album" (1968).

I've known Mr. Hamilton a long time, and he had invited my wife and me to tea at his stunningly converted Oxfordshire farmhouse. It was his 88th birthday, and his wife, the artist Rita Donagh, served us his birthday fruitcake in the paneled drawing room. Mr. Hamilton, whose gray beard and prominent front teeth give his long face a noble, equine look, sat on the black leather sofa, flanked by a pair of Eames chairs. He walks with an elegant silver-headed stick, needed because of persistently troubling knees, but his recent heart-valve repairs were so successful that he had no difficulty tossing a couple of large logs on the fire.

The Serpentine's publicity for the current show says "the installations, prints and paintings on view take international politics, riots, terrorist acts and war as their subject matter, examining how these conflicts are represented by the media, including via television and the Internet." But Mr. Hamilton also has a playful, lyric side. Some of these aspects of his work are bound to be displayed in the dozen or so exhibitions now being planned to celebrate his status as one of Britain's senior artists. These include the 26 works from the Metropolitan Museum's own collection being shown in New York until May 2; the exciting show at the Prado, "Picasso's Meninas" (March 23 to May 30); and the show from May 27 to July 3 at the two Alan Cristea Galleries in London. Shows are also in the works for the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, and for Madrid, Paris and Munich.

© 2010 Richard Hamilton (2); Rex Features (portrait)

Richard Hamilton, above, plays with politics: 'Swingeing London 67,' 1968-69, shows the arrest of his art dealer, Robert Fraser, and Rolling Stone Mick Jagger; 'Shock and Awe,' 2007-08, portrays former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair as a gunfighter in America's Old West.

Mr. Hamilton is also known for his association with Marcel Duchamp—his reconstruction of Duchamp's broken masterpiece, the "Large Glass" or "La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même" is a big debt art history owes to him.

"I became a sort of family friend of Duchamp and his wife, after 1957, when I embarked upon a typographic rendering of his Green Box [Duchamp's notes for the 'Large Glass'], which took me and a collaborator three years," Mr. Hamilton told me. "I sat next to Marcel in the airplane when we flew to Pasadena for the opening of the first retrospective show of his work.

"Later," he continued, "I remember that I was once asked to a dinner south of Paris where the other guests were Duchamp and René Magritte; and these ties led to friendships with Jasper Johns, John Cage, Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg."

In addition to Duchamp and Magritte, who died in the 1960s, Mr. Hamilton has been been an artist long enough to have known the likes of Roland Penrose and Lee Miller. I know that Mr. Hamilton is interested in food (he's written a limpid, beautifully crafted introduction to a recent book about the Spanish superchef Ferran Adrià, a friend of his) so I asked whether Miller was the exceptional cook he's reputed to have been.

He thought for a moment: "A good cook, but so slow that the guests always had to join in the cooking or we wouldn't get fed until midnight."

As the Serpentine publicity suggests, all the work in "Modern Moral Matters" is protest of one sort or another, including the 1983-84 installation "Treatment Room," an operating theater where the patient is condemned forever to watch then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher speaking on a TV monitor, and 1981-83 painting of the "dirty protest" at Long Kesh prison in Northern Ireland, in which paramilitary prisoners used filth (including their own waste) to make a case for change. This should be a very angry show. But if you divide artists into those who have a tragic view of life, and those who view human existence and history as fundamentally comic, Mr. Hamilton falls into the second category. Irony is his default setting.

As we drove away from his farmhouse, the headlights of our car picked out dozens of flashing eyes. They were muntjac, the exotic miniature deer that have escaped zoos and gone native in Britain. We often see a solitary one, but Mr. Hamilton's garden had been invaded by an entire herd. Not very good for the flowers and shrubs, but I can imagine Mr. Hamilton finding the muntjac attack curiously amusing.

Paul Levy is a writer based in Oxfordshire.

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